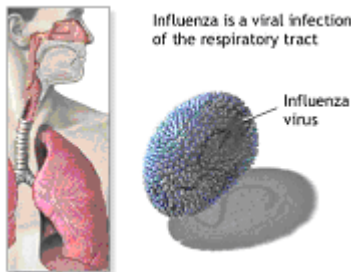


INFLUENZA

(FLU)

WHAT IS INFLUENZA?

Influenza (flu) is a serious disease. Influenza is caused by a virus that spreads from one infected person to the nose or throat of another. Influenza causes an average of 36,000 deaths each year in the United States, mostly among the elderly. Most people are ill with influenza for only a few days, but some get much sicker and may need to be hospitalized.



WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

- Fever
- Sore throat
- Cough
- Headache
- Chills
- Muscle aches
- Nasal discharge
- Shortness of breath
- Fatigue

WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS?

Anyone can get influenza. The following individuals are at high risk of severe illness from influenza:

- People age 50 or over
- People living in long-term care facilities with chronic medical conditions
- People with long term (chronic) health problems such as:
 - Heart disease
 - Lung disease
 - Asthma
 - Kidney disease
 - Diabetes
 - Anemia and other blood disorders
- People with a weakened immune system due to:
 - HIV / AIDS or another disease that affects the immune system
 - Long – term treatment with drugs such as steroids
 - Cancer treatment with x-rays or drugs
- People 6 months to 18 years of age on long-term aspirin treatment (these people can develop Reye Syndrome if they catch influenza)
- Pregnant women who will be past the 3rd month of pregnancy during the flu season
- Health care workers

An annual flu shot is also encouraged for:

- Healthy children 6-23 months of age
- Household contacts and out-of-home caretakers of infants from 0-23 months of age, especially those younger than 6 months
- People who provide essential community services
- People at high risk for flu complications who travel to the Southern hemisphere between April and September, or who travel to the tropics or in organized tourists groups at any time
- People living in dormitories or under other crowded conditions, to prevent outbreak

- Anyone else who wants to reduce their chance of catching influenza

HOW IS INFLUENZA DIAGNOSED?

The diagnosis can often be made from the symptoms without further testing. If other tests are indicated, your health care provider may swab your throat or obtain a chest x-ray.

HOW IS INFLUENZA TREATED?

For mild illness in people who are not high risk, the treatment of influenza usually includes bed rest, analgesics (pain killers) for muscle aches and pains, and increased intake of fluids. If influenza is diagnosed within 48 hours of the onset of symptoms, particularly among high-risk groups, your health care provider may chose to treat it with an antiviral medication.

HOW CAN I REDUCE MY CHANCES OF GETTING INFLUENZA?

You can reduce your chances of getting influenza by taking the [influenza vaccine](#) (flu shot). You should remember that:

- Influenza viruses change often. Therefore, influenza vaccine is needed every year.
- Protection develops about 2 weeks after getting the shot and may last up to a year.
- Some people who get the flu vaccine may still get flu, but they usually get a milder case than those who did not get the shot.
- Flu vaccine may be given at the same time as other vaccines, including the pneumococcal vaccine.
- The best time to get a flu vaccine is in October or November.
- You should not take the vaccine if you are allergic to eggs, have a high fever, or have an illness like pneumonia.
- Do not take antibiotics for the flu. They won't work against the flu virus.

- The vaccine can't cause the flu, but you may feel sore or weak or have a fever for a couple of days.

REFERENCES / LINKS:

Department of Health and Human Services: Centers for Disease Prevention and Control

<http://www.cdc.gov/nip/flu>

Department of Health and Human Services: Food and Drug Administration

<http://www.fda.gov/opacom/lowlit/clds&flu.html>

VA National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention

<http://www.nchpdp.med.va.gov/>

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER



- Should I get a flu shot?
- When should I get it?
- Am I at risk of getting severely ill if I get the flu?
- **Before you take the flu vaccine:**

Let your health care provider know if you:

1. Have ever had a serious allergic reaction to eggs, or to a previous dose of influenza vaccine
2. Have a history of Guillain-Barre' Syndrome
3. Have a fever or are severely ill at the time the shot is scheduled

There are two key people on your health care team, you and your health care provider. You are just as important as your provider in directing your health care. The first step you should take in becoming an active team member of your health care team is to understand what you are being treated for and why. Continue to ask questions until you understand the answer. By paying attention to your health and maintaining your own records, you will become an active, informed decision maker in your health care.



Endorsed by: VA National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention